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ABSTRACT

Peer feedback by students, both positive and negative, has proven to be helpful to many public speaking educators. Asking students to design their own evaluation sheets can not only guarantee the numbers of evaluations they receive, but also assist them to do more audience analysis during the preparation process for their speeches. In designing his or her own evaluation sheets, each speaker is asked to use questions he or she wants to ask the audience. The speaker then makes enough copies for the class and brings them on the speech dates to distribute among the class before the presentation. Students show more enthusiasm giving feedback to individual speakers on different kinds of evaluation sheets. They write down comments and suggestions, which are friendlier in tone. More important, designing their own evaluation sheets encourages students to think more when preparing their presentations. (Contains three references.) (CR)

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DESIGN YOUR OWN EVALUATION SHEETS

SUBMISSION TO : SPEECH COMMUNICATION ASSOCIATION

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DESIGN YOUR OWN EVALUATION SHEETS

GOAL: *To maximize the use of peers' feedback by asking students to design their own evaluation sheets. This method can not only guarantee the numbers of evaluation sheets each student receive, make evaluating less boring, but also help students incorporate more audience analysis into their speech composition.*

Starting their experience in public speaking at freshmen's level, what students need most is probably a comfortable environment which could not only lessen their nervousness, but also help them benefit from other class members. Peers' feedback , both positive and negative, has proved to be extremely helpful by many public speaking educators. (e.g. Hillock, 1986; Daly & Vangelisti, 1990.) In my classes, I found asking students to design their own evaluation sheets can not only guarantee the numbers of evaluations they receive, but also assist them to do more audience analysis during the preparation process for their speeches.

Using feedback sheets from the textbook

General instructions of public speaking courses in Purdue University suggest instructors ask each student to evaluate four to five presentations each time for four speech assignments during the whole semester. (One group presentation, two informative speeches and one persuasive speech.) Five copies of evaluation sheets for each assignment were already printed in the text book with questions such as: What was the thesis of the speech? What were the main points? Did you get any new information? What's the speaker's strength? What is one thing you suggest the speaker change? For the

persuasive speech, there were additional questions: How complete was the proposal? Would you enact the recommendations of the speaker? Why or why not? (Smith, 1995.)

At the beginning of the semester, I asked all students to use the five feedback sheets to evaluate all other group presentations and make additional 15-20 copies of an evaluation sheet for the first informative speech to evaluate all other speakers except on the date of their own presentations. I told them that I was going to read all of their evaluations but I would not grade them. It did not take me too long to notice some problems. Some students always left their textbooks at home and forgot to tear those sheets from their books, or they forgot to make enough copies to bring to class. (Actually some of them said reluctantly: Why do I have to spend money copying those sheets to evaluate *others*?) Also, they seemed to get a little bored to evaluate some 20-25 speeches using exactly the same sheets. Quite a few of them simply took a piece of paper and wrote done some simple words such as: Good speech! Great job! No improve-ment needed!-- no matter what quality the speech had. Some students also forgot to write down the speakers' names on the sheets. Sorting out hundreds of those sheets and putting them together with each student's outline and my comments took me quite a long time. And I was always left with a small pile of scratch sheets, not knowing whom they belonged to.

Design your own evaluation sheets

Many communication educators have agreed on the positive effect of peers' feedback on students. (e.g. Hillock, 1986; Daly & Vangelisti, 1990.) Were my students a little reluctant to do evaluations because they saw them as merely assignments from me? The questions from the textbook also looked more like students reporting their observations to *me* instead of telling *their peers* how they feel about their presentations?

How should I use feedback to set up dialogues between each student and his/her peers and audience. Before we started the second informative speech, I spent 20 minutes in class talking about the importance of audience analysis and their feedback. Then I assigned all speakers to design their own evaluation sheets, raise questions they want to ask their audience most, make enough copies, bring them in on their speech dates and distribute among the class before their presentations. We also spent some time discussing how to raise those questions.

Appraisal

I was amazed at students' creativity when I saw their self-designed evaluation sheets. Quite a few of them set up scales for the audience to evaluate their performance, and what their audience needed to do was simply check boxes. Some students even used cartoons' facial expressions instead of words to represent different satisfactory levels of their presentation. They raised some simple but fundamental questions such as: Are you concerned with what I am talking about? Is my topic interesting to you? Is my suggestion acceptable? Was I well-organized? Did I confuse you? Did my introduction catch your attention? and so forth. Students also had specific questions on the subjects of their speeches. Besides, they did not forget to thank their peers by including appreciation and greetings for upcoming holidays.

Those evaluation sheets also brought better results from evaluators. Students showed more enthusiasm giving feedback to individual speakers on different kinds of evaluations sheets. They wrote down more comments and suggestions. Additionally, their comments were more friendly in tone. I did not have to worry about the audience

forgetting to bring in enough evaluation sheets. Collecting and sorting them out also became a lot easier.

More important, to design their own evaluation sheets encourage students to think more when preparing their presentations. First, I started to see more students paying more attention to their audience when choosing topics. Some of them approached me saying they decided to change the topics already selected from the common topics lists in the textbook, because they did not want to bore their audience. For example, one student decided to change his persuasive topic from *abortion* to the *cancellation of the 7:30 morning classes.* He told me when he was thinking about his own evaluation sheets, he wanted to ask: Do you care about what I am talking about? Then he decide to change the topic because the new one seemed to be more relevant to his peers at college fresh-men's level. The feedback on his evaluation sheets not only showed audience's very strong support on his proposal, but also their suggestions and discussions of feasibility of other solutions.

Hillock (1986) has concluded from researches on composition teaching that engaging young writers actively in the use of criteria, and applying to their own would result in not only more effective revisions, but also superior first drafts.(p. 160.) I found this was also true for my classes on speeches. Students who set up evaluation scales showed more efforts and better performance than their former speeches on those criteria, such as eye contact, organization, strength of arguments, clearance, volume, and so forth.

Researchers have showed that the combination of peer and teacher feedback is stronger than only teacher feedback. (Hillock, p. 246.) When I gave back my comments

and peers' evaluations to the students, I saw them reading them very carefully and they smiled. Many students said they liked the idea.

Further Discussion

Tight schedules of public speaking classes makes it very difficult for students to redo any speeches, while they can always revise compositions or papers. Designing their own evaluation sheets has been a helpful method, yet because students receive feedback after their speeches, they might not get important information when they are preparing the whole speech. A typical example from my classes was one student did his informative speech on Chicago. When he found from the evaluations that most of his audience had been to the places he talked about and did not get any new information, it was already too late for him to improve that speech. Designing their own evaluation sheets and get feedback from the audience *before* speech presentations maybe an useful method, which seems difficult to implement, but well worth experimenting.

Readings:

Daly, J. A. Friedrich, G. W. & Vangelisti, A. 1990. *Teaching communication: Theory, research, methods.* Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Hillocks, G. 1986. *Research on written composition: New directions for teaching.* Urbana, IL:ERIC Clearinghouse on Reading and Communication Skills and the National Conference on Research in English.

Smith, R. E. 1995. *Principles of Human Communication.* Hendau/ Hunt Publishing Company: Dubueque, Iowa.